

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2107

June 25, 2019

Chairman Jerrold Nadler
House Judiciary Committee
2141 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC

Chairman Steve Cohen
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties
House Judiciary Committee
2141 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC

Dear Chairmen Nadler and Cohen,

I write to you today in support of [H.R. 40](#), the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act. Last week's historic hearing titled "H.R. 40 and the Path to Restorative Justice," which examined the need for reparations, was a profound moment in our nation's evolution. For descendants of slaves in America, true liberation has never been realized -- we are still enduring state-sanctioned racism, discrimination, and terror. Slavery was physical violence, condoned and carried out by the state, and it defined and permeated the entire American system. Institutionalized oppression and barriers were and are manmade and we have the power to dismantle them.

While Juneteenth highlights the final abolishment of slavery in the state of Texas, the decades that followed verified that emancipation did not eliminate oppression. Waves of lynching, Black Codes, imprisonment, and Jim Crow laws took root followed by the War on Drugs, mass incarceration, discriminatory housing policies, and economic oppression. Fear, violence, and division are all tools of oppression. Those tools still exist today but have taken root by other names -- algorithmic prejudice, gentrification, the racial wealth gap, and police brutality to name a few.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's recent tone-deaf comments prove exactly how dire the need still is to continue pushing for equity, truth, and justice in America. His refusal to take any action on legislation to protect health care, combat gun violence, and ensure paycheck fairness perpetuates the systemic prejudice and inequality that keeps black Americans enslaved. Senator McConnell is a direct contributor to the current system of injustice despite his claim that "none of us currently living are responsible" for the racism and discrimination engrained in so many of our policies and institutions.

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We have come to accept the false promise that if you work hard and play by the rules, you can achieve the American dream. Yet, for every dollar of wealth held by whites, black Americans hold just 8 cents. In fact, it would take 228 years for black Americans to achieve the level of wealth currently held by white Americans.¹ That is not justice. It was the great laureate James Baldwin who wrote:

“Ask [...] any black man, any poor person — ask the wretched how they fare in the halls of justice, and then you will know, not whether or not the country is just, but whether or not it has any love for justice, or any concept of it. It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.”

No longer can we stand for blatant injustice and ignorance. We must ask ourselves what does true equality and fairness look like in America?

Though I do not serve on the Judiciary committee, I stand firmly in solidarity with the committee’s pursuit of healing and justice for those of us who are entangled in decades of systemic oppression and incessant brutality. The emancipation of black people – people who spent centuries brutalized and disenfranchised and are still suffering the residual effects of slavery – was only the first step in our liberation. We must also deliver thoughtful, intentional, and adequate reparations to all black Americans.

We must continue to be bold in our activism by conducting these painful but necessary conversations, so we can guarantee justice for the millions of Americans who suffered centuries of vile, cruel, inhumane treatment. We must continue to come together, to foster community, to see the humanity in one another, and to resist. We must honestly and openly acknowledge our sordid past and present, so we can adequately chart the best path forward.

In solidarity,



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress
Massachusetts 7th Congressional District

¹Asante-Muhammad, D, Collins, C, Haxie, J, Nieves, E. (2016). *The Ever-Growing Gap: Without Change, African American and Latino Families Won't Match White Wealth for Centuries*. https://prosperitynow.org/sites/default/files/resources/The_Ever_Growing_Gap-CFED_IPS-Final.pdf